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ABSTRACT

Boys are especially active users of media, and researchers have suggested that the cumulative impact of media, such as television, movies, and music videos, may make them some of the most influential forces in boys' lives. This report presents the findings of a national poll of 1,200 young people (ages 10 to 17) and focus groups in which boys offered their own insights into the media. Sections include: (1) "Media That Boys Consume"; (2) "Sex and Violence"; (3) "Attributes of Male Characters"; (4) "Emotions, Sensitivity, and Vulnerability"; (5) "Problems and Solutions"; and (7) "Real Life Men vs. TV Portrayals." The report lists key findings from the poll, including the following: (1) children see men on television as leaders and problem solvers, funny, successful, confident, athletic, and focused on the opposite sex; (2) male characters in the media rarely cry; (3) one in five male characters employs some form of physical aggression to solve problems; (4) over one-third of children say that they never see television males performing domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning; (5) male characters of color are more likely to focus on solving problems involving family, personal, romantic, or friendship issues, while white male characters are consistently motivated by succeeding in work, preventing and managing disaster, and pleasing nonromantic others; and (6) across race and gender, the majority of children believe that the boys and men they see on television are different from themselves, boys that they know, their fathers, and other adult male relatives. (LPP)

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boystoMEN

ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA

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1

Messages About Masculinity

A national poll of children, focus groups, and content analysis of entertainment media.

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Children Now is a nonpartisan, independent voice for America's children. Using innovative research and communications strategies, Children Now promotes pioneering solutions to problems facing America's children. Recognized nationally for its policy expertise, up-to-date information on the status of children, and leading work with the media, Children Now focuses particular attention on the needs of children who are poor or at risk, while working to improve conditions for all children by making them a top priority across the nation.

The **Children & the Media Program** works to improve the quality of news and entertainment media for children and about children's issues. We seek to accomplish that goal through independent research, public policy development, and outreach to leaders in the media industry.

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highlights

boys to MEN: Entertainment Media Messages About Masculinity

KEY FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL POLL OF CHILDREN AND A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TELEVISION PROGRAMS, MOVIES, AND MUSIC VIDEOS MOST WATCHED BY BOYS.

EXPECTATIONS

- Children see men on television as leaders and problem solvers, funny, successful, confident, and athletic.
- A majority of children say that men and boys on television are often portrayed as focused on the opposite sex; as one boy said, "His main goal is to get the girl."

VULNERABILITY AND EMOTIONS

- Although male characters in the media displayed a range of emotional behavior, including fear, anger, grief, and pain, they rarely cried.
- Children believe that men and boys on television are least likely to be seen crying or showing vulnerability and many kids thought that "sensitive" did not describe television's male characters.

VIOLENCE AND ANGER

- Some level of violence appears in over half of the sample of television shows and movies most popular with adolescent boys.
- Almost three fourths of children describe males on television as violent and more than two thirds describe men and boys on television as angry.
- One in five male characters employs some form of physical aggression to solve problems.

WORK VS. DOMESTIC

- Across boys' favorite media, men are closely identified with the working world and high prestige positions, while women are identified more often with their domestic status.
- Over one third of children say that they never see television males performing domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning.

RACE

- Men of color are more likely to focus on solving problems involving family, personal, romantic, or friendship issues; while White men in the sample are consistently motivated by succeeding in work, preventing & managing disaster (i.e. "saving the day"), and pleasing non-romantic others (e.g., family members, friends, co-workers).

TV VS. REALITY

- Across race and gender, the majority of children believe that the boys and men they see on television are different from themselves, boys that they know, their fathers, and other adult male relatives.
- Many kids believe that financial wealth is an over-represented sign of success on television, and that their ideas of real-life success are underrepresented on television.

Today's society perpetuates rigid rules and expectations about masculinity and the media continuously reinforce the message. With their unique ability to influence and inform, the media also has the power to reach beyond stereotypes and present a fuller picture.

Introduction

At the end of 20th century America, we live in a society that often sends confusing and conflicting messages to men and boys. They are bombarded with information that reinforces gender expectations no longer consistent with the diversity of current family and workplace roles. Expectations have expanded. The rules have changed.

The nation's boys are confused, and many of them are also in jeopardy. Boys are more likely than girls to fall behind in school, to commit suicide, to be involved in violent crime. Indeed, in recent years the anger and despair of boys has resulted in horrific acts of violence. How can we support and influence our nation's boys to become stable, productive, and caring men?

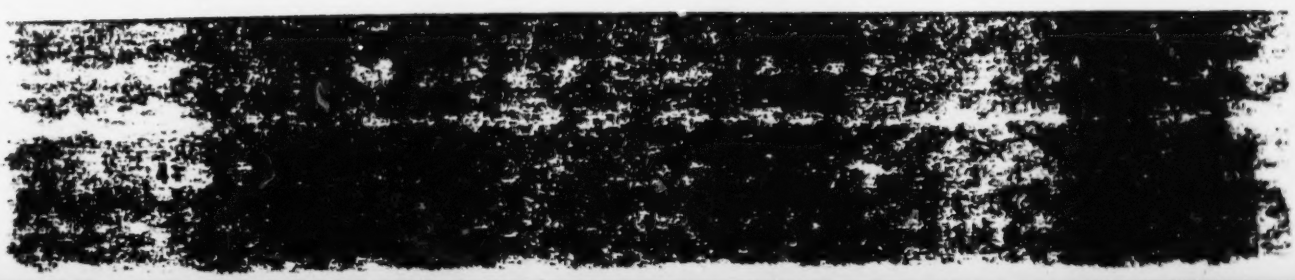
As boys pass from childhood to manhood, they develop their moral and ethical code. They learn to handle emerging sexuality. They clarify conceptions of gender roles. And they prepare for their future careers. While young people have traditionally been guided in these paths by familiar sources—family, friends, religion—today's boys are increasingly influenced by an ever-expanding and pervasive media.

From an early age, boys are especially active users of media, watching hours of television, movies, music videos, and sports, listening to radio and CDs, surfing the Internet, and playing computer and video games. Researchers have suggested that the cumulative impact of these media may make them some of the most influential forces in their lives, especially during adolescence. Yet there is remarkably little research on media's influence on boys.

To explore this important issue and to expand on our previous research on gender,[1] Children Now commissioned research into the media's messages about masculinity and their impact on boys. In-depth content studies analyzed messages in the prime-time television shows, movies, and music videos most frequently watched by boys. Included in the research is a national poll of 1,200 young people (ages 10 to 17) and focus groups in which boys offered their own insights into the media they consume.

We learned that, in spite of the complex and changing work and family experiences of real-life men, media portrayals do not reflect this complexity. Rather, messages and images remain strongly stereotypical. Indeed, men are pictured in a variety of roles. Yet across all characterizations, those who are admired share predictable and time-worn attributes.

[1] *Reflections of Girls in the Media*, Children Now, 1997



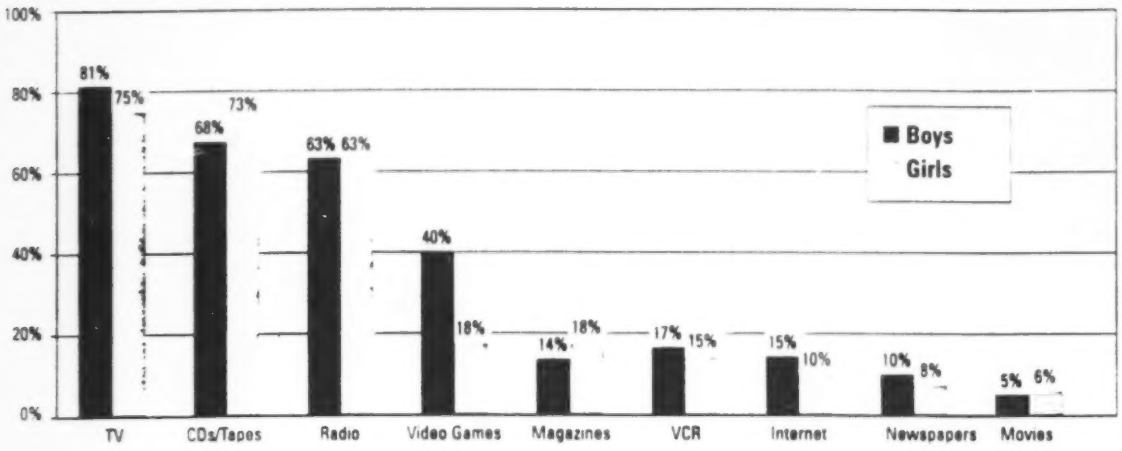
Men are expected to be leaders. Whether exhibiting positive or negative behavior, they must be confident, successful, funny, and athletic. They are characteristically violent and angry and, regardless of circumstances, they are not to cry. Men are also seen as problem-solvers, though the problems men face and the solutions they use vary depending upon the man's race. And finally, men in the media are defined not by their relationships (as are women) but by their careers.

Today's young people, while consuming unprecedented quantities of media, experience a contradiction between their own reality and media messages about masculinity. While they identify the characteristics and behaviors so familiarly attributed to men, they also recognize that the men and boys they see on TV are not like themselves nor the boys and men in their own lives.

This groundbreaking study provides valuable insight into the identity formation of boys. Gender roles are shifting. Media influence is growing. And the next generation is defining its place in the adult world. **How young people absorb and integrate the media's images along with their personal experiences will have a profound impact on the expectations and behavior of a new generation of men.**

Media That Boys Consume

Daily Media Consumption by Gender (1999)



"What makes me watch *the Simpsons*? It's funny."

- **Children between the ages of 10 and 17 most often spend their time watching television programs, listening to music on CDs and tapes, and listening to the radio.**
  Television is the top medium of daily use for all children through the eighth grade, when music and radio then surpass television. After watching television and listening to music, kids enjoy playing computer or video games, watching movies on a VCR, or reading magazines. Children are least likely to read a newspaper or go to the movies on a daily basis.

- **Music videos, comedies, and cartoons are the television programs kids most frequently watch.**
  After these types of programming, kids enjoy sports programs and talk shows like *Jerry Springer* and *Oprah*. Least watched programming includes news, news magazine programs, and reality-based shows like *Cops* and *Rescue 911*.

- **Boys are more likely than girls to watch television, play video games, and use the Internet.**
  Although both boys and girls are most likely to watch television programs almost daily, a larger percentage of boys do so than girls (81% vs. 75%). Boys are more than twice as likely as girls to play video games (40% vs. 18%) and are also more likely to use the Internet (15% vs. 10%). Girls are slightly more likely to read magazines and more likely to listen to CDs and tapes on a regular basis.

- **Boys' favorite television programs and movies are comedies and are most likely to be ones that recommend parental guidance.**
  Over half of the television programs and movies that boys (ages 12-17) watch are comedies. The television programs that boys watch most frequently are rated TV-PG and the movies they watch are most likely to be rated PG-13.

- **Boys are more likely to watch sports and cartoons and girls are more likely to watch talk shows.**
  Boys are five times more likely than girls to watch sports programming on a regular basis (33% vs. 7%) and enjoy cartoons daily (36% vs. 27%). Girls are more than twice as likely to watch talk shows (25% girls vs. 10% boys).

Favorites and Role Models

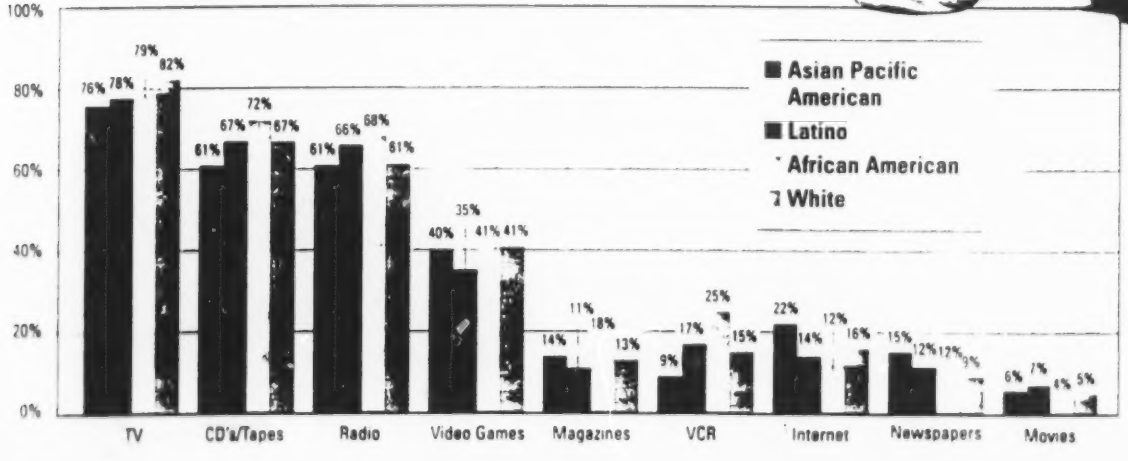
Children's Favorites on TV[7]

BOYS	GIRLS	OVERALL
Tim Allen	Brandy	Will Smith
Will Smith	Will Smith	Bart Simpson
Bart Simpson	Sabrina the Teenage Witch	Tim Allen
Kramer	Bart Simpson	Brandy
Jerry Seinfeld	Jennifer Love Hewitt	Jerry Seinfeld
Homer Simpson	Rosie O'Donnell	Tim Taylor
Tim Taylor	Oprah Winfrey	Sabrina the Teenage Witch
Stone Cold Steve Austin	Tim Taylor	Kramer
Adam Sandler	Courtney Cox	Cast of Seinfeld
Cast of Seinfeld	Tim Allen	Homer Simpson

- **Boys Choose Boys, Girls Choose Both**
  When asked to choose 3 television role models, 80% of boys choose male personalities, while only 16% choose a female. Conversely, 57% of girls choose males and 59% choose females. Further, 43% of boys choose only males, while only 25% of girls choose only females.

- **Boys Say Humor, Girls Say Appearance**
  Boys are much more likely than girls to list "funny" as their top reason for choosing an individual to be one of their favorites (56% vs. 38%), whereas girls are almost three times as likely to say "because they are pretty or handsome" (29% vs. 11%).

Daily Media Consumption by Race (1999)



[7] Character's and actors' names are listed as children responded without any adjustments.

Sex & Violence

"See, in TV if you have sex, you are cool. That is the bottom line."

Sex & Media

- **Sexual activity is shown in almost half of the sample of media most popular with boys.**
  Movies in the sample portray the most sexual activity, with over two thirds containing some level of sexual content (67%). Of those movies, over half of the depictions are coded as serious in nature (60%).

  Almost half of television shows (48%) depict sexual activity, half of which are significant to the plot. The sexual content in 58% of these shows is light and comic in nature.

- **A majority of children say that men and boys on television are often portrayed as focused on the opposite sex.**
  Most children say men and boys often are shown talking about the opposite sex (75%), wanting to have a girlfriend (74%), and wanting to kiss or have sex (69%). As one boy said, *"The guy has to get laid or the guy has to get rejected. His whole main goal is to get the girl."*

Violence & Media

- **Some violence appears in over half of the sample of television shows and movies most popular with boys.**
  Across media in our sample, movies contain the most violence. All of the movies in the sample contain violent depictions, with frequent violence in 60% of those viewed.[3] Further, the violence tends to be serious in nature and in nearly 90% of the cases, the violence is significant to the plot or a major feature of the film.

  Television shows have much less violence than movies, with almost two thirds of shows (64%) in our sample having no violence at all. Of the television shows that contain violence, more than half of the depictions are light or comic (56%) or incidental to the plot (56%).

- **Accordingly, children say they see violence most often in movies and video games.**
  Almost two thirds of children say they see violence in movies a lot of the time (62%). Similarly, when asked what they thought was the most violent medium, a plurality of children say movies (49%) and more than one fourth say video games (27%). Further, 82% of children say they see violence in video games "a lot" or "some of the time." As one boy observed, *"On* Blitz *and stuff, it makes the game more fun because if you were playing a normal football game, you wouldn't be able to see somebody pick somebody up and throw them. Like in* Blitz *and games like that, they tackle and they body slam. It makes the game more fun sometimes."*

- **Almost three fourths of children describe males on television as *violent*.**
  Children say that the adjective "violent" describes males on television well (72%). There is little difference in boys' and girls' perceptions.

[3] Infrequent (less than 1/4 of scenes), Moderate (between 1/4 to 1/2 of scenes), and Frequent (more than 1/2 of scenes).

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However, boys who name a cartoon character as their favorite television character are more likely to view television males as violent than boys who choose a male or female character.

- **More than two thirds of children describe men and boys on television as *angry*.**
  When asked how well the adjective *angry* describes males on television, 69% of children say it describes them well. Older boys are most likely to view television males as *angry*, with more than one fourth of 16-17 year-olds (27%) noting that the adjective describes males "very well." Asian Pacific American children are least likely to think that *angry* describes males on television "very well" (16%).

Music Videos

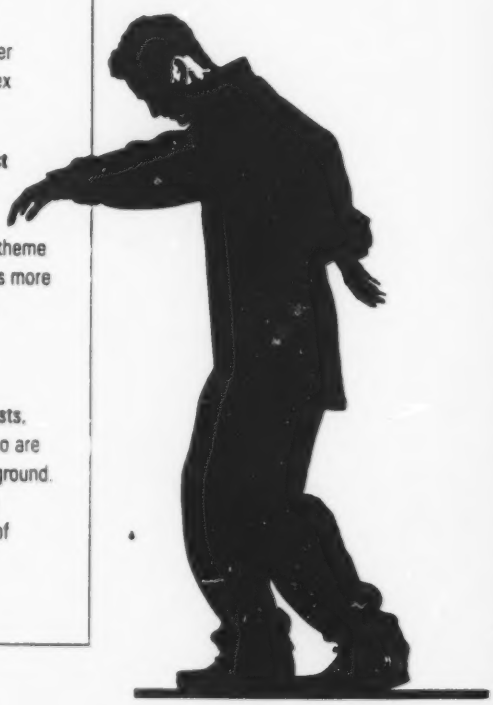
Since the birth of MTV in 1981, music videos have become a significant media force. Nearly one half of the children polled watch videos daily (49%) and the percentages are higher for populations such as African American boys (63%) and Latina girls (58%). Given this considerable presence in children's media consumption, Children Now looks at some of the messages and images in today's most popular music videos.

- **Almost two thirds of the characters in music videos are male.**
  Sixty-two percent of music video characters are men, with 54% White and 42% African American.

- **The most common theme in music videos is love and romance.**
  Themes of love and romance are the most frequent in the sample (25% primary). Other primary themes include: socio-political issues/social protest (20%), bravado (20%), sex (10%), and family relationships (5%).

- **Males tend to appear more frequently in videos with themes of social protest and bravado, while females appear more frequently in videos focused on love and romance.**
  Males are nearly three times as likely as females to appear in videos with a primary theme of social protest (29% vs. 11%) or bravado (16% vs. 6%), while females are four times more likely to appear in videos featuring a primary theme of love/romance (39% vs. 10%).

- **Female bodies are more likely than male bodies to be objectified in the videos sampled.**
  More than one quarter of the videos include some degree of attention to female breasts, legs, or torsos. Almost two thirds of videos feature females as props—characters who are used by the central performer in the course of his/her actions or who appear as background. While female props are as likely to be semi-nude (25%) as to be dressed in revealing clothing (25%), male props (used in 40% of the videos) tend to be fully clothed most of the time (75%).



Attributes of Male Characters

Characteristics, Features & Expectations

- **Children see men on TV as *leaders* and *problem-solvers*.**
  More than three fourths of children describe boys and men on television as being *leaders* often (78%) and almost three fourths describe them as solving problems often (73%). Boys are more likely than girls to say that television males are shown as *leaders* and *problem-solvers*. Further, a plurality of children believe *in charge* (44%), *courageous* (43%), and *intelligent* (40%) can be used to describe a majority of boys and men on television very well.

  These perceptions correspond with the actual portrayals of male characters on television. Almost all of the male characters in the sample engage in problem-solving behaviors (94%) and almost half are leaders or demonstrate initiative (40%).

"They are always the hero. They are always saving someone."

- **Children believe that television males are *funny*.**
  Overwhelmingly, children say that boys and men on television are well-described as *funny* (98%). Kids hold this perception across racial, gender, and age lines—majorities of all groups of young people believe that a sense of humor describes the males on TV.

  Children also think that television males *acted dumb* often (72%). While this characteristic might be considered a sign of immaturity, it may also be a trait associated with being *funny*. *Acting dumb* can be laughable, but positive. For example, one boy describes his favorite television characters as males who *"act stupid.... They will run into anything and they'll yell and how they talk and make fun of people."* When *acting dumb* creates laughter, it can be admired as a positive feature.

  Notably, younger and older boys assert that their positive role models need to have a sense of humor. One boy says, *"I like the Simpsons because it is funny. I like Bart because he doesn't care. He just does whatever he wants regardless."* Another male shares, *"...I watch Martin and he don't say all the best things in the world but he is funny and takes my mind off some of the pressure points."*

- **Men on television appear *confident, successful,* and *athletic*.**
  Ninety-one percent of children polled believe that men on television are usually portrayed as *confident*, and 94% are likely to use the term *successful* to describe men on television. Children also believe that TV males are *athletic* (90%) and say that they often see males on television playing sports (80%).

  Accordingly, a majority of children contend that *weak* is not an appropriate description of boys and men on entertainment television (58% believe *weak* does not describe males on TV well). However, heavy media users[4] are more inclined to say that they sometimes see *weak* male characters. Thirty-five percent of boys with heavy media use and 42% of girls with heavy media use say that *weak* describes male characters "somewhat well."

[4] Heavy media users are defined as children who say they use four or more media on an almost daily basis.

Identity Roles

- **Across boys' favorite media, men are more closely identified with the working world and high prestige positions, while women are identified more often with their domestic status.**
  Male characters are more often shown at their place of work, while female characters are more frequently shown at home. Eighty-eight percent of children polled say that they see males on television in the working world, and over one third say that they never see television males performing domestic chores such as cooking or cleaning.

  Correspondingly, relationship status is more obvious for female characters and occupational status is more obvious for males. While approximately one third of female characters are married or involved in a serious romantic relationship, marital status is unidentifiable for nearly half of the male characters. Likewise, occupational status is unknown for nearly half of the female characters. When her status can be determined, the female character is more likely to be shown in traditionally female occupations such as teacher, student, homemaker, or clerical worker. Male characters are more likely to be shown in higher status occupations, such as executive/CEO, professional, or business owner, and are also more frequently cast in traditionally male-dominated fields like politics, the military, and law enforcement.

- **Television, movies, and music videos most popular with boys present a world of males, especially straight White males.**
  Overall, males constitute just over two thirds of the population represented in these media (68%) and two-thirds of them are White. This imbalance is most pronounced in movies where there is only one female character to every three males. Male and female characters are almost entirely heterosexual, with only 1% portrayed as homosexual or bisexual.

Social Behaviors

Pro-social Behaviors of Male Characters	Percent
Initiative/Leadership	38%
Offering Advice/Support	31%
Affection/Nurturance	29%
Helping	23%
Asking for Help/Advice	13%
Delivering Praise	11%
Giving/Gifting	9%
Expression of Confidence	8%
Compromise/Diplomacy/Negotiation	5%

Anti-social Behaviors of Male Characters	Percent
Ridiculing/Insulting	30%
Deception/Lying	24%
Aggression without Weapon	24%
Aggression with Weapon	22%
Noncompliance/Defiance/Rebellion	20%
Dominance	18%
Verbal Aggression	18%
Arguing	11%
Law Breaking	10%
Ignoring/Dismissing	3%

- **The vast majority of males in this sample perform anti-social behaviors.** Nearly three fourths of the male characters examined (74%) perform at least one anti-social behavior and more than half perform two or more. The most frequently performed anti-social behavior is ridiculing/insulting.

  Almost two thirds of the anti-social behaviors coded are aimed exclusively at other males (63%). Females are the exclusive targets of anti-social behavior approximately 15% of the time. And males and females together are targeted approximately 20% of the time.

- **The majority of male characters, especially characters of color, also engage in pro-social behavior.** More than two thirds of the characters in the sample perform at least one pro-social behavior (69%) and the majority perform two or more. Initiative/leadership is the most frequently depicted behavior for males, with nearly four in ten displaying these behaviors. Approximately 30% of characters demonstrate affection or offer advice and support. Nearly one fourth of the sample performs helping behaviors (23%). Males are rarely shown compromising and almost never shown sharing with others.

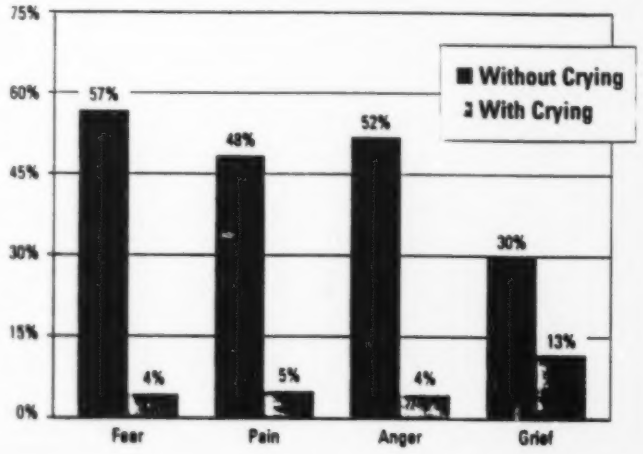
  Minority male characters are significantly more likely than White characters to engage in pro-social behaviors. More than 80% of the minority characters perform at least one pro-social behavior, compared to 70% of White characters.

Emotions, Sensitivity & Vulnerability

- **Although male characters in the media display a range of emotional behavior, including fear, anger, grief, and pain, they seldom cry.**
  While more than four in ten male characters (43%) express some sort of emotional behavior, very few expressions involve crying. For example, out of 61 characters showing fear, only four do so with crying. Similarly, few men cry while experiencing pain (5 out of 53) or feeling anger (4 out of 56, all in movies). Male characters are most likely to cry when experiencing grief (13 out of 43).

- **Children believe that men and boys are least likely to be seen crying or showing vulnerability on television.**
  Overwhelmingly, children in the national poll say that they rarely see men or boys showing signs of vulnerability, such as crying, on television (57% every now and then, 18% never). Among certain populations, the perception that men on TV never cry is particularly strong—24% of Latino boys and 22% of Asian Pacific American boys say that they have never seen men or boys on television shedding a tear. Among boys who choose male television characters as their favorites, 23% say that men never cry on TV.

Male Characters' Frequency of Emotions Expressed (1999)



Further, kids in the focus groups say that television rarely portrays men expressing their feelings, crying, or showing anything that might be considered vulnerability. As one older participant states, *"They act like males can't cry. If I'm mad, I'm going to cry. So it's like, how are you going to say a male can't cry? If I'm hurt, I'm going to cry... I'm not supposed to cry? No, I cry."*

"And if guys are emotional, it's like, 'Oh man! They lost the football game.'"

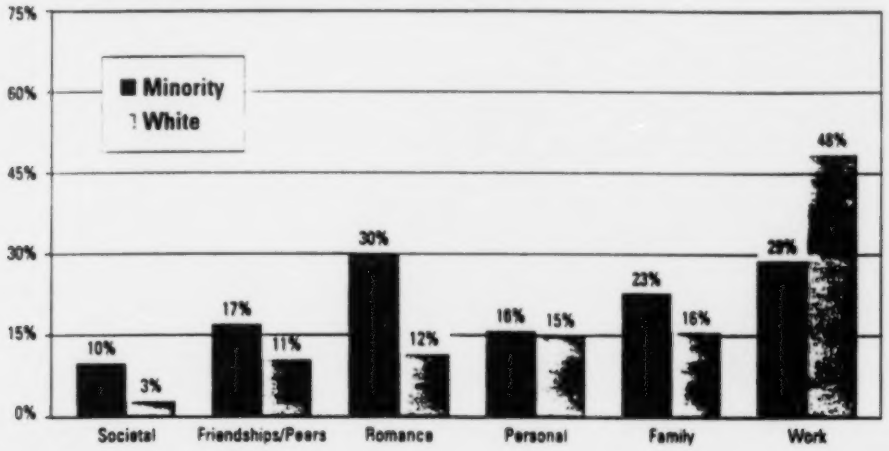
- **Many kids think that "sensitive" does not describe television's male characters.**
  Thirty-eight percent of boys and 24% of girls polled believe that *sensitive* is an inaccurate description of television boys and men. Likewise, 40% of boys and 36% of girls in the poll think that the adjective *emotional* is also inappropriate. One focus group participant explains why he doesn't think men on television are portrayed as *sensitive*: *"Yeah, like towards women. Like the female comes home and she's all down. Then the male will ask her, 'Well how was your day?' She'll say, well such and such, and they'll be like, 'Oh, I don't want to hear it...'"*

- **Emotional behavior by male characters is equally likely to be reinforced positively and negatively.**
  Because most male displays of emotion are done in isolation (44%), there is frequently no response from other characters. However, the displays that involve other characters are equally likely to be reinforced positively (24%) as negatively (26%).

Problems & Solutions

Most television programs and movies follow a common narrative format involving characters and their problems: What are the conflicts? Where are the complications? Will there be a solution? Who will be successful? Often, characters have several dilemmas and motivations in a storyline, falling into primary and secondary categories. Looking at the males on the TV shows and in the movies that boys watch most, there are several interesting patterns regarding their characters' problems, motivations, and solutions.

Primary Problem Areas for Male Characters by Race (1999)



Problems & Motivations

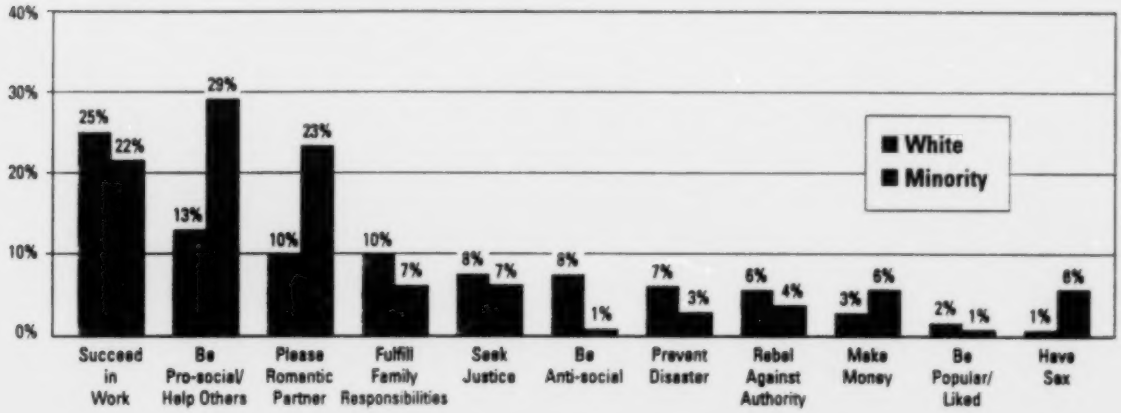
"Every now and then you'll see some people who are mature enough to talk things out."

- ***Work* is the greatest source of problems and motivation for male characters, especially for White men.**
  More than four in ten male characters have primary problems and more than one in five male characters have secondary problems involving their *work*. However, while almost half of the White males have primary problems at *work*, less than one third of the men of color do.

- **Problems and motivations differ between minority and White male characters.**
  - Minority male characters are more likely than White male characters to have primary problems involving *family, personal, romantic,* or *friendship* issues. *Romantic* relationships provide the most **primary** problems for minority men (30%), followed by *work* (29%), *family* (23%), *friendship* (17%), and *personal* issues (16%). The corresponding figures for White male characters (aside from *work* at 48%) are consistently lower: *family* (16%), *romance* (12%), *friendship* (11%), and *personal* issues (15%).

  - White male characters are consistently more motivated than minorities by *succeeding in work* (25% primary, 22% secondary), *preventing and managing disaster* (7% primary, 8% secondary), and *pleasing non-romantic others* (2% primary, 6% secondary). Yet they are also far more motivated by *being anti-social* (8% primary and 15% secondary vs. 1% primary and 4% secondary for minorities).

Primary Motivation for Male Characters by Race (1999)



- Minority male characters are consistently more motivated than Whites (primarily and secondarily) by *pro-social behavior/helping others* (29% primary, 40% secondary), but also by *making money* (6% primary and 18% secondary vs. 3% primary and 7% secondary for Whites) and *having sex* (6% primary and 6% secondary vs. 1% primary and 5% secondary for Whites).

- **Problems facing and motivations driving male characters correlate to the age of the character.**
  Older adults (43%) and settled adults (53%) are most likely to experience *work-related* problems, while adolescents experience the most *friendship* and *romance* problems (46% and 42% respectively). The largest age group in the sample—young adults—experience primary problems related to *work* (38%), *romance* (25%), and *personal* areas (22%) most frequently.

  Correspondingly, adult males are most frequently motivated by *succeeding in work* (35%), as are young adults (19%). Adolescent characters are equally motivated by *pleasing a romantic partner* (33%) and *pro-social behavior/helping others* (33%). Young adults are also highly motivated by *pleasing a romantic partner* (17%).

Solutions

- **Male characters demonstrate initiative or leadership ability most often as their way of solving problems.**
  Almost half of the male characters in our sample (45%) show initiative or leadership ability as a means to solve the problem at hand. White males are more likely than minority males (49% vs. 40%) to demonstrate this type of problem-solving behavior.

- **Almost one third of male characters offer advice/support or talk about their feelings as a way of solving problems.**
  In our sample, 29% of male characters provide advice and support or discuss their emotions to deal with an issue or resolve a situation. Men of color are more likely than White men to offer advice and support as a problem-solving strategy (38% vs. 26%).

- **One in five male characters employs some form of physical aggression (21% with weapons, 19% without weapons) to solve problems.**
  Men of color are more likely than White men to engage in physical aggression with weapons (27% vs. 19%). White men are more likely than men of color to engage in physical aggression without weapons (21% vs. 15%). One boy reflects, *"They solve things physically. Like it is not so much by talking things out. Sometimes either they just let it sit or they keep building up inside or they fight and duke it out."*

Problem-solving Behaviors Used by Male Characters

Problem-solving Behavior	Percent
Initiative/Leadership	45%
Offering Advice/Support, Talking About Feelings	29%
Deception/Lying	23%
Risk-taking	21%
Aggression with Weapons	21%
Aggression without Weapons	19%
Noncompliance/Defiance/Rebellion	18%
Dominance	18%
Verbal Aggression	15%
Helping	15%
Asking for Help/Advice	13%
Using Technology	10%
Law Breaking	9%
Affection/Nurturance	8%
Ridiculing/Insulting	8%

- **Male characters employ *pro-social* behaviors about as often as *anti-social* behaviors to solve problems.**
  In our sample, male characters use *pro-social* and *anti-social* means with nearly equal frequency to solve their problems. Almost half of the male characters in the sample use a combination of both types of behaviors.

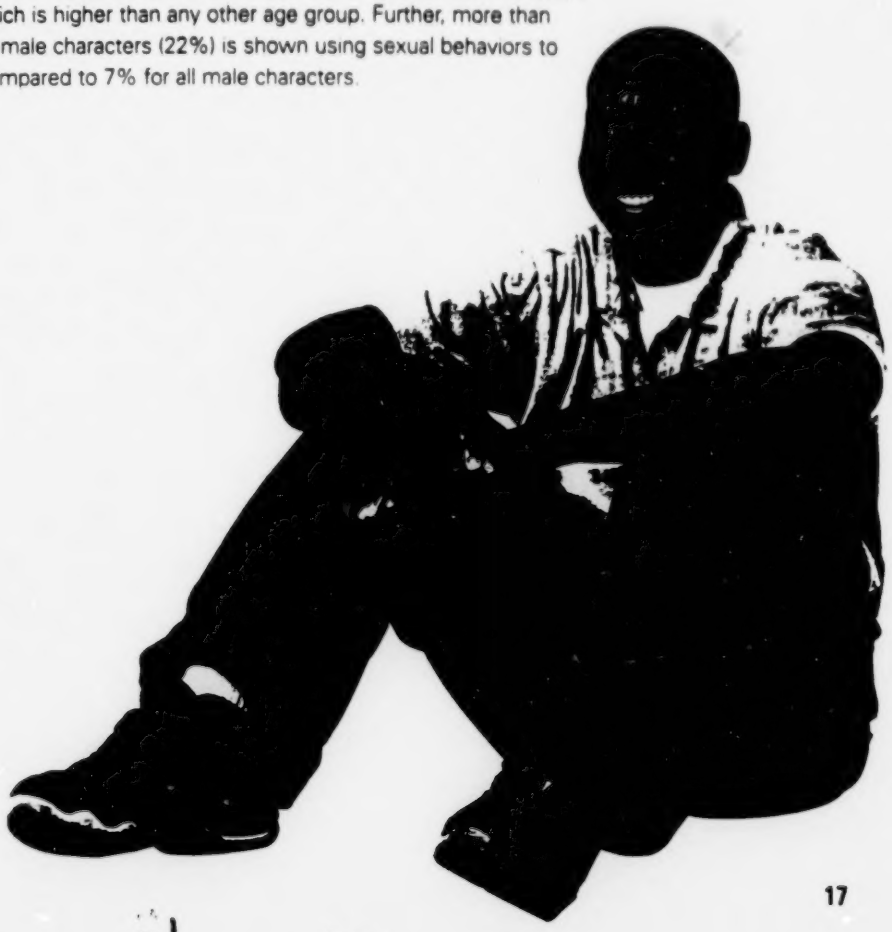
  Almost two thirds of the characters (66%) use at least one type of *pro-social* behavior (such as *taking initiative/leadership, offering advice or talking about feelings, asking for advice, helping others, providing affection, delivering praise*) when solving their problems. Men of color are more likely than White men to demonstrate *pro-social* problem-solving behaviors (71% vs. 64%).

Similarly, two thirds of the characters (67%) use *anti-social* behaviors *(aggression with and without weapons, deception/lying, dominance, noncompliance/defiance, verbal aggression, ridiculing/insulting, lawbreaking, arguing, ignoring, dismissing)* to solve their problems. White men are more likely than men of color to exhibit *anti-social* problem-solving behaviors (71% vs. 57%).

- **Minority characters are more likely to use sexual behaviors to solve their problems, while White characters are more likely to use *deception, dominance,* and *ridicule.***
  Although only a very small proportion of characters employ sexual behaviors in problem solving (7%), people of color were nine times more likely than Whites to be shown using these strategies (18% vs. 2%). Sexual behaviors include: talking about sex, sexual talk in and outside a relationship, and sexual activity in and outside a relationship.

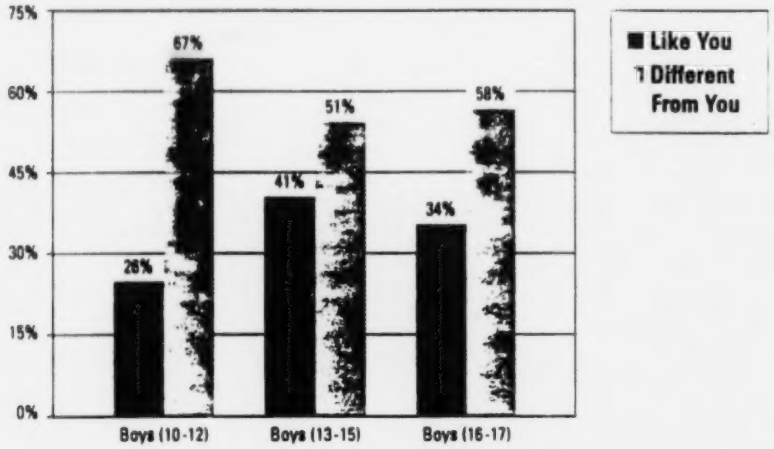
  White male characters are more likely than minority male characters to use *deception* (23% vs. 15%), *dominance* (20% vs. 12%), and *ridicule* (10% vs. 3%) to solve problems.

- **When dealing with their problems, young adult male characters use the most anti-social behaviors and adolescents use the most sexual behaviors.**
  Almost three fourths of young adult male characters (73%) use *anti-social* behaviors to solve problems, which is higher than any other age group. Further, more than one in five adolescent male characters (22%) is shown using sexual behaviors to solve his problems, compared to 7% for all male characters.



Real Life Men vs. TV Portrayals

How Similar are Male Characters to the Males in Your Life?



- **Across race and gender, the majority of children believe that the boys and men they see on television are different from themselves, the boys they know, their fathers, and other adult male relatives.**

"In some TV shows the man goes by every rule the woman says or they have no morals at all...no father or anyone I know does that."

- More than half of boys (58%) say the male figures they see on television are different from themselves or other adult male relatives; only one third of boys (34%) say the males they see on television are like themselves or other adult male relatives. As one boy explains, *"Boys are portrayed generally as childish and immature on television. But in reality, take myself for example, my friends say I'm too mature and worry too much."*
- Latino and Asian Pacific American boys cite in disproportionate numbers (67% and 63% respectively) the differences between themselves and other males they see on TV, while African American boys are slightly more supportive of the notion that the males they see on television are accurate to their lives (37% vs. 34% of all boys).
- Notably, two thirds of younger boys (ages 10-12) say TV does not offer a realistic picture of themselves and their male relatives, as compared to 54% of older boys (ages 13-17).
- More than half of girls (58%) believe that the males they see on television are different from the males they know in real life; less than one third (31%) believe that they are similar.
- Minority girls are more likely than White girls to believe the portrayals of males are different from males in their own lives. High numbers of African American, Asian Pacific American, and Latina girls say the portrayal on television is different from males they know (71%, 70% and 68% respectively), compared to 53% of White girls.

How Are Males on TV Different from Males in Your Own Life?

Response	Percent
They behave differently	27%
They look different	14%
They don't have real problems	10%
They have more money	8%
They are goofy or funny	6%
They are more popular	5%
They have adventures/exciting things happen	5%
They dress differently	3%
They have different jobs or careers	3%

- **While the majority of children believe television males are different from those in real life, they give varying reasons for the difference.**
  Fifty-eight percent of children say that boys and men on television are different from those they know personally. Children offer many reasons for the difference including "they behave differently" (27%), "they look different" (14%), and "they don't have real problems" (10%). Across race, the top two responses are "they behave differently" or "they look different," with African American children the most likely to say "they behave differently than me" (32%).

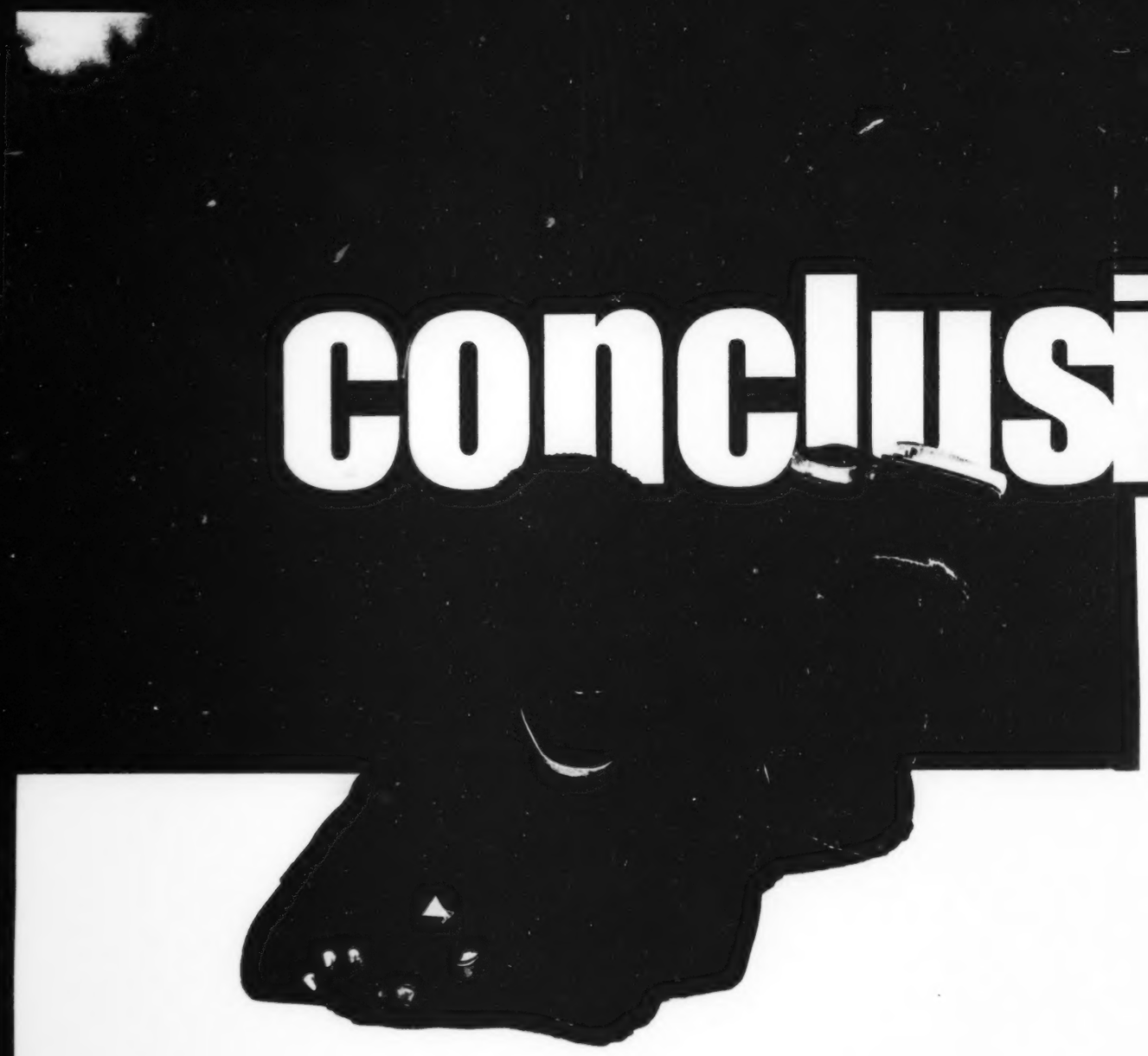
  Interestingly, boys are slightly more likely than girls to cite behavioral differences (29% vs. 26%), whereas girls are slightly more likely to cite appearance (18% vs. 10%) and not having real problems (13% vs. 8%).

- **Portrayals of success on television are not necessarily aligned with young people's ideas of real-life success.**
  Compare one boy's personal ideas of success, *"When they are older, if they have a job and if they have a good family and stuff – that is successful,"* with other boys' perceptions of success on TV, *"A rich guy with a lot of good clothes and a huge house and everything... and a beautiful wife."* Thirty-eight percent of the children polled think that "having money" indicates success on entertainment television, but only 21% think that it is a realistic indicator of success. Thus, many kids believe that financial wealth is an over-represented sign of success on television, stronger than it is in real life.

  Correspondingly, children also believe that some of their ideas of real-life success are underrepresented on television. For example, 24% of children believe that having a good job/career is real-life success but only 16% believe that it is depicted as such on television. Another 21% of children believe having the respect of family and friends is a realistic indicator of success, but only 10% find that it is portrayed as such by entertainment television.

  Moreover, some kids criticize television portrayals of success because of their racial implications. As one younger boy points out, *"The White guy has the nice car, the job and everything. And he has that big house and he is more successful than the Black guy... [Television] shows that if you have more money, you are happy. But in reality, you are not..."*

conclusion



Today's boys navigate a perilous path toward manhood. Even if he is raised in a healthy, loving environment, a boy must sort out powerful societal messages that limit and restrict the definition of masculinity—the definition of who he should become. And he will hear and see these messages reinforced and amplified on television, in the movies, in music videos, and in video games—throughout his favorite sources of entertainment. Serious or subtle, the media's role in defining manhood is significant. And it is also filled with potential. With its unquestionable ability to influence attitudes and affect behavior, the media has the power to alter the drumbeat—**to enlarge the options**—to provide boys a fuller, more complete picture of the men they can become. ■

"It is a powerful media to have in your hands so try to make it something positive."

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Methodology & Acknowledgements

Content Study: Conducted by Katharine Heintz-Knowles, Ph.D. and Meredith Li-Vollmer, M.A., the study looked at entertainment content in three media that are most popular with adolescent males:[5]

- 25 prime time broadcast television programs receiving the highest Nielsen ratings among adolescent males. Two episodes of each program were recorded for analysis between April 25 and May 8, 1999.[6]
- 15 films shown in theatres in 1998 that were the most popular with adolescent boys, as identified by lists generated from *Variety* magazine and CinemaScore.
- 20 music videos that were most requested on MTV in the first quarter of 1999.

All content was subjected to two levels of analysis. Researchers conducted a macro-level analysis that examined such characteristics as genre, rating, and overall level of sexual and violent content. Researchers then conducted a micro-level analysis, identifying each primary and secondary character appearing in each of the content domains and examining such characteristics as gender, race, occupation, and marital and parental status. In addition, each male character was subjected to further analysis to identify primary and secondary motivations and problems, problem solving behaviors, and general behaviors.

All content was coded by the researchers and two other trained coders. To ensure reliability among coders, 20% of the sample was coded by each of the coders independently. The percent of agreement between coders was calculated. All variables in this analysis received a level of agreement of at least 85%.

National Survey: The poll of 1,200 children was conducted by Lake Snell Perry & Associates from June 15 to June 28, 1999. Telephone numbers for the survey were drawn from a random digit dial methodology (RDD). The interviews consisted of four base samples of 300 White children, 300 African American children, 300 Latino children, and 300 Asian Pacific American children. Each of the four base samples was then broken down by gender — 200 interviews of boys and 100 interviews of girls within each sample. These samples were then weighed so that each of these demographic groups reflects their actual contribution to the total population of children. The sample size with these weights applied is 330 cases. The data overall were weighted by age to ensure an accurate reflection of the population. The poll has a margin of error of +/- 5.7%.

Focus Groups: Lake Snell Perry & Associates conducted two focus groups of boys on May 10, 1999. The two focus groups were organized by age (boys ages 12-14 and 15-17) and each group included a total of ten participants of different races. The focus groups took place in Secaucus, New Jersey.

[5] For the purposes of this study, we defined adolescent males as boys ages 12-17

[6] Due to program scheduling, just one episode of *Guiness World Records: Primetime* and *World's Scariest Police Chases 6* were included in this sample.

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Footnote on Racial Terms

After consulting broadly with the advocacy and academic communities, we decided to focus our research on the four largest racial groups in the United States: White, African American, Latino, and Asian Pacific American. As race terminology is constantly evolving, we have chosen terms most likely to be used by that particular racial group.

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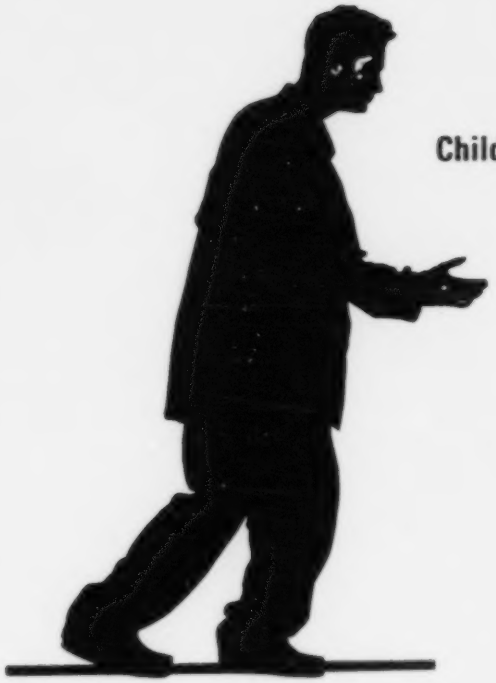

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